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Thank you

to Blake Smith for sharing his useful research on the history of silver bullets in werewolf lore.

This Issue's Cover features a digital painting by Daniel Loxton.

THE HOWLING HORROR OF WEREWOLVES!

HELLO!

Today, we will dare to track down some of the most ferocious beasts from movies and myth—werewolves! These savage shapeshifters have inspired tales of terror for centuries.

People didn't always believe that werewolves were make-believe creatures. For hundreds of years werewolves were feared as an all too deadly threat. Farmers huddled near guttering candles at night, terrified that bloodthirsty beasts prowled just outside the door. Soldiers hunted werewolves. Accused werewolves were captured and punished. Amazingly, witnesses have even reported werewolf sightings in modern America! How can that be?

Let's Find out!



HOLLYWOOD WEREWOLVES



Werewolves are best known today as classic movie monsters.

They've terrified audiences for more than 100 years, appearing in countless movies and TV series since the silent film era.

The early horror films *Werewolf of London* (1935) and *The Wolf Man* (1941) made werewolves into movie stars.

They've been prowling across our screens ever since.

What makes werewolves such popular monsters?

They're wild, powerful, and dangerous. Werewolves are fast, strong, ferocious—and incredibly hard to kill.

In some stories, werewolves can keep their human intelligence while transformed. Good characters like *Harry Potter's* Professor Lupin or the noble werewolf clan in the *Twilight* movies make powerful allies.

Most werewolves aren't so lucky. They're cursed to lose all control when they transform, becoming savage, bloodthirsty predators. That's horrifying!

A werewolf might attack innocent people or even their own family without realizing it.

Werewolves are also hidden in plain sight.

Even the most friendly and gentle character could transform into a killer whenever the Moon rises.

ORIGINS OF WEREWOLVES

Horror movies may be the modern habitat of the werewolf, but where did the legend come from? The origin of werewolves is a bit complicated, and I'm afraid that story includes some gory details and images. It's not too late to turn back!

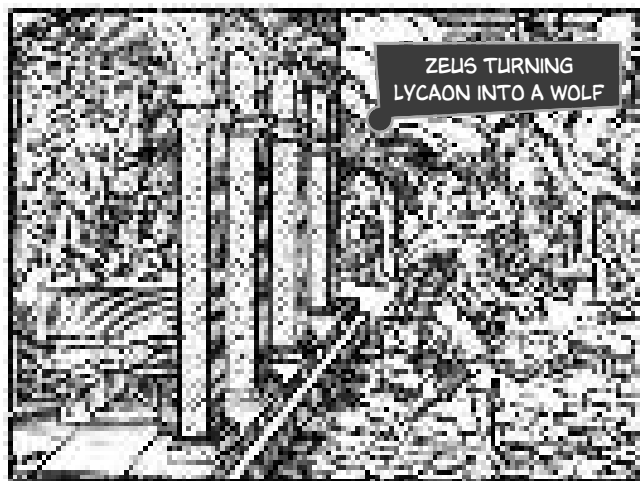
Some legends began at a specific moment in history. For example, the Loch Ness monster legend did not exist until it suddenly burst into stardom in 1933. Other mysteries are far, far older—so old that their origins are lost in time. Nobody knows when the first ghost stories were told. Haunted house stories were already old in ancient Roman times. Ghost stories are probably as old as spoken language.

Werewolf legends are both old and new. Some of the things we think about werewolves were invented by modern filmmakers. However, the idea of people transforming into wolves is very ancient indeed.

Werewolves in the Ancient World

Our ancestors have shared this world with wolves for millions of years. Wolves were already top predators when prehistoric people learned to make spears and tell tales around the fire. Sometimes our ancestors were hunted by wolves. This made it easy for ancient storytellers to imagine wolves as monsters. It was also easy to imagine transforming into animals—soaring like birds, fighting with the strength of a bear, and so on. Cultures all over the world have told animal transformation stories. Many feature wolves. Ancient people respected, feared, and hated wolves, and all for the same reason: wolves are smart, swift, and deadly. Transforming into a wolf might give a warrior great power. Or, it might reveal that a person had the evil soul of a murderer.

In one story from ancient Greek myth, a wicked king named Lycaon dared to secretly serve human flesh to Zeus, the almighty king of the gods. Zeus was furious when he detected this gruesome deception. The wrathful god destroyed the king's palace with "avenging fire." Zeus then



GRAY WOLF

transformed the king into a wolf so that Lycaon's body would match his bloodthirsty killer's heart. The story of Lycaon's punishment gave us the word "lycanthropy," which can mean either a magical curse that transforms a human into an animal, or a psychological delusion that one does become a beast.

A story about one cursed king isn't the same as a general belief in werewolves. Individual people and gods were often transformed into animals in Greek mythology. Nonetheless, werewolf stories started to spread.

"That men have been turned into wolves, and again restored to their original form" was a common belief by the time of the Roman writer Pliny the Elder. Pliny felt confident that these claims were completely bogus. He was appalled that this "fabulous" belief was "firmly fixed in the minds of the common people" and promoted by respected authors. Those sources claimed that members of a certain family would sometimes dive into a lake and emerge in the form of wolves. Pliny didn't believe this for a second, saying, "There is no falsehood, if ever so barefaced," that won't be claimed by some irresponsible writer.

A modern-sounding werewolf tale was also included in a Roman novel called the *Satyricon*. In the story, two men walk by a moonlit cemetery. One suddenly strips naked, transforms into a wolf, and runs off into the night to attack cattle. A farmworker stabs the wolf in the neck with a pitchfork. Later the werewolf is found in human form—injured in bed with an identical neck wound.

MEDIEVAL WEREWOLVES

Werewolf beliefs were common throughout Europe during the Medieval period of castles and kings. The reason is probably simple: back then, wolves really did occasionally eat people.

Hungry Wolves

Modern people usually think of wolves as beautiful, majestic, and harmless to humans. It's true that wolf attacks are very rare in North America. I've come face to face with wild wolves myself. Those close encounters were quiet and peaceful. You can well imagine that I felt intimidated, but I wasn't terrified. I knew that human beings are not normally prey for American or Canadian wolves. Our wolves tend to be rather shy.

However, rare wolf attacks do sometimes occur. The disease rabies can cause wolves to become extremely aggressive. Rabid wolves will bite as many people and animals as possible. (This is how the disease is spread.)

Healthy wolves may also decide to hunt people if normal food sources such as deer become scarce. Modern wolf attacks are somewhat more common in other parts of the world such as Russia, India, and Iran.

However, wolves were a much more serious danger to people in Medieval Europe, for several reasons. There were a lot more wolves in those days, and far fewer people. Peasants in the countryside lived much closer to the animals of the forests. They had no guns. Centuries of hunting have now

taught modern wolves to avoid people. Back in Medieval times, wolves sometimes learned instead that humans were slow, weak, and easy to catch.

Many thousands of people were killed by wolves over the centuries. The distant memory of that danger is preserved in folktales such as "The Boy Who Cried Wolf" and "Little Red Riding Hood"—and in the enduring legend of the werewolf.



Becoming Wolves

Medieval werewolf beliefs and stories were common, but they weren't all the same. In some stories, werewolves were cursed because they did something wrong. Others were tricked into wolf form, had spells cast upon them, or were simply born into a family of werewolves. Some stories gave no reason for the werewolf's transformation.

In the Norse culture of the Vikings, fearsome berserker warriors went into battle wearing bear or wolf skins. These warriors were sometimes thought to gain the power of the animals whose skin they wore. Some were even said to literally transform into those fierce animals for battle. In those stories, animal transformation was not a

curse, but a superpower.

However, a different Norse story claimed that werewolves in Ireland were cursed by Saint Patrick. One clan was punished for mocking the saint's religious teachings, so that "all the members of that clan are changed into wolves" either every seven years or for seven years at a time. Irish werewolves were "eager to devour men" in this version of the story. Ireland's werewolves were considerably friendlier in another version told by an English writer about 800 years

ago. He claimed that a priest had been surprised in recent years when one Irish werewolf walked up and spoke to him in a human voice. “Rest secure, and be not afraid,” said the wolf. The werewolf explained that he was a man cursed to take the form of a wolf for seven years. He then politely asked the priest to please come to pray for another werewolf who lay sick and near death. The trembling priest agreed. He followed the wolf into the woods. They found the wolf’s friend lying under a tree, moaning in pain. The priest prayed with her, then shared a fire with the friendly werewolf. The next morning the werewolf helpfully led the priest back to the road and warmly thanked him for his help.

Not every werewolf was quite so courteous or peaceful. In England, explained another writer, “it is certain there are men who at certain waxings of the moon are transformed into wolves.” This author claimed personal knowledge of two werewolves by name. One had “devoured children” and attacked adults with “keen and savage teeth.” When a brave carpenter managed to chop off a foot from that werewolf using an axe, the injury restored the werewolf’s human form. The former werewolf later told everyone he was “right glad” to lose his foot because it saved him from the curse.

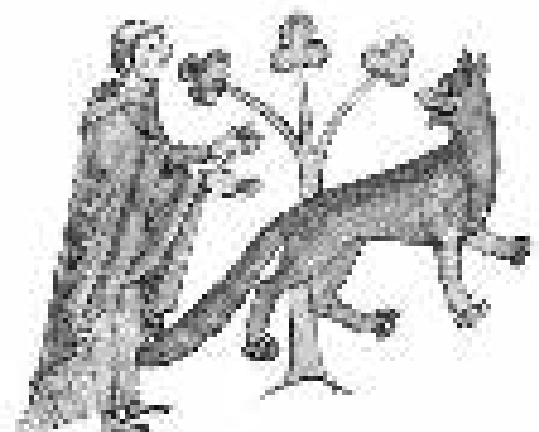
One famous story from France said werewolves were “known in every land.” One such was a brave and handsome knight who would transform into a wolf for unknown reasons for three days every week. One day the knight confessed this secret to his wife. Unfortunately, she was not to be trusted. The next time he turned into a wolf, she secretly stole his clothing. This prevented him from turning back into a human. She then married another knight she

loved more. Her betrayed husband was stuck in wolf form for more than a year. Then, one day, the king went hunting in the same woods. The king’s hounds chased the werewolf “till he was torn and bleeding” from many wounds. When the king came close, the wolf gently licked the king’s feet to beg for mercy. The king was so amazed that he made the wolf his pet. The wolf harmed no one, and was much loved by the king—until one day the wolf spotted the other knight who had betrayed him. The werewolf attacked his rival and had to be held back. The wolf became even more savage when he later spotted his unfaithful wife. The king so trusted the wolf that he decided to imprison and interrogate the wife. She soon confessed her crimes. The werewolf’s clothes were returned. He became human again and regained his lands. The scheming lovers were banished from the land.

A longer and more violent English version of this same tale involved the legendary King Arthur, a werewolf king named Gorlagon, and two cheating queens. Gorlagon’s wife betrayed him by chopping down a magical tree and cursing him to the form of a wolf.

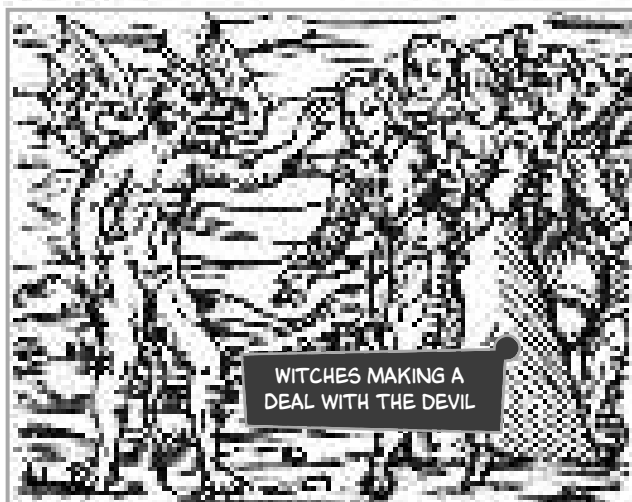
Many people clearly believed that men and women could sometimes turn into wolves. But these early werewolf tales were quite different from one another. Werewolves were savage predators in some stories, and unfortunate heroes in others. It took another kind of supernatural folklore to start bringing the many different kinds of werewolf

stories together into one legend: the belief that countless evil witches were hidden throughout society.



ILLUSTRATIONS FROM *TOPOGRAPHIA HIBERNICA*, AN 1187 MANUSCRIPT ABOUT IRELAND. HERE A PRIEST PRAYS WITH A FRIENDLY, SICK WEREWOLF.

WITCHES AND WOLF TRIALS



Most cultures have a belief that some people have magical powers—sorcerers, fortunetellers, witches, and so on. Witches aren't always said to be evil, but their supposed powers are feared. Concern about the imaginary dangers of witchcraft simmered in Europe throughout the Medieval period. Then, in the early centuries of the Renaissance or Early Modern period, fear of witches exploded into waves of violence.

People in many European countries became convinced that witches were absolute, pure evil. Witches supposedly worshipped the Devil and worked in secret to harm innocent people. This made them a deadly threat to everyone. To keep society safe, it was necessary to find the witches, expose their evil practices, and punish them. Usually the punishment was torture and death—often by burning alive. Sadly, thousands of innocent people were killed after someone falsely accused them of witchcraft.

The witch hunts are remembered today as the one of the worst and most tragic mistakes in human history. How did people come to do such horrible things? The big problem was that bad things often happened in the world, and no one knew why. For example, people struggled to understand illness because no one knew about germs. When someone sickened, or unexpected hail storms wiped out crops, or wolves began to hunt villagers, people had no good explanations for these unfair and terrible tragedies. Witchcraft beliefs provided an explanation, even if it was totally false.

If someone fell mysteriously ill, for example, their illness might be blamed on someone they'd quarreled with in the past. Perhaps their neighbor was secretly a witch! If the accused person was rich or had a large or powerful family, the accusation probably wouldn't get far. After all, it's hard to prove an imaginary magical crime. Rich people had resources to help them defend themselves. But if the accused person was poor, mentally ill, unpopular, or alone—such as

a penniless old widow—they might find themselves arrested for witchcraft. Accused "witches" would then be tortured until they agreed to anything and everything, no matter how outlandish the accusation. Once they "confessed" under torture, they were done for.

Werewolves and Witchcraft

Witchcraft also provided an explanation for wolf attacks. Even back then, it wasn't an everyday occurrence for people to get eaten by wolves. An area might not have any attacks for years, and then suffer a plague of savage attacks in a short time. Why now, all of a sudden? People did not always understand that wolves were driven to attack because they were diseased or starving. Could witches be responsible?

It was widely believed that the Devil granted witches fantastic magical powers. They could supposedly fly, make people sick, and even summon storms. They could also transform themselves into animals such as hares, cats—or wolves!

In this way, werewolf stories and witchcraft beliefs became combined into one big superstition. Wolf attacks were just one more way for witches to hurt people. A werewolf was just another kind of witch!

Werewolves on Trial

Amazingly, many accused werewolves were arrested and put on trial. Most were poor peasants, hermits, or homeless people. Some were mentally ill. A few may actually have murdered people, while others may have been unfairly blamed for attacks by normal wolves. Most were found guilty and sentenced to death.

These bizarre trials show us some of the ways in which people attempted to explain horrors such as deadly wolf attacks or multiple murders. They also reveal a curious relationship between witchcraft beliefs, religion, and new scientific attitudes that had just started to take root.

Around 1521, for example, a traveller in France was attacked by a wolf. The traveller wounded the wolf, and the animal ran away. The wolf's tracks seemed to lead to the isolated hut of a man named Michel Verdun. Verdun was arrested as a werewolf. He soon named two more supposed werewolves. One was Pierre Bourgot, who told an incredible tale under torture. He claimed that he and Verdun had made a deal with demons who gave them a magical lotion to transform into werewolves. The wolves supposedly ravaged the countryside together, devouring several children. All three men were executed.

It's difficult to know what really happened in many werewolf cases. Records are scarce. The use of torture made so-called confessions completely unreliable. In 1578, a hermit named Gilles Garnier was executed after confessing that he was a werewolf. Witnesses apparently caught the fully human Garnier near one young victim. He was also blamed for several

wolf attacks. When interrogated, he “freely confessed” that he was the wolf. He was then burned at the stake. Was he tortured? Threatened? Delusional? Was he guilty of one murder? None? Several? There’s no way to know.

The most famous werewolf trial was probably that of Peter Stubbe, also called “the Werewolf of Bedburg.” Around 1589, neighboring towns in Germany suffered a terrible series of wolf attacks. Many farm animals were eaten. Men, women, and children were found mauled by a predator. Others simply disappeared. Witnesses described a large wolf. One girl was very lucky to survive when the wolf seized her by the throat. Her coat protected her from the wolf’s teeth. The cows she was tending then charged the wolf with their horns, chasing it away.

Men grimly hunted the killer wolf with large dogs. Finally they thought they had the wolf surrounded. However, when they closed in, they found only the farmer Peter Stubbe, casually strolling along the road with his walking stick. At first they were confused. Eventually they decided that Stubbe must be a werewolf. He was arrested and threatened with torture using a horrible machine called the rack, which stretched people by the arms and legs until they were disjoined in agonizing pain. Stubbe, “fearing the torture, voluntarily confessed” to sixteen hideous murders. He claimed the Devil had given him a magical belt that transformed him into a “greedy, devouring wolf, strong and mighty,” with eyes that blazed in the night like fire.

Before this, Stubbe seemed like a nice person. He was polite and well liked. According to the tale extracted by his interrogators, however, Stubbe was a depraved maniac “inclined to blood and cruelty.” He was just good at hiding it. The court claimed that he routinely smiled and waved to neighbors he was already planning to murder.

He was found guilty and sentenced to a truly gruesome death. The judge ordered Stubbe strapped to a large wheel. His flesh was ripped with red hot pin-cers. His arms and legs were broken with a club. Then he was beheaded. Finally, his body was burned for good measure. His head was placed on a pole as a warning to other werewolves.

Today, Stubbe is sometimes considered an early example of a “serial killer” (a person who commits a series of apparently pointless murders based on personal compulsions). Was Stubbe truly guilty? Or was he just some poor guy who happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time? We

may never know for sure. However, there are reasons for skepticism. The only evidence connecting him to any of the deaths was the unbelievable tale he “voluntarily confessed” under threat of torture. All of the deaths could be better explained as wolf attacks. Witnesses literally saw the wolf. Stubbe also was not found with any magical werewolf belt, but an ordinary walking stick. When authorities checked the place where Stubbe “confessed” he hid the belt, “it was not to be found.” That’s probably because it never existed.

Doubt and Certainty

Witch and werewolf trials were cruel travesties of justice. There were no real witches to find. They were an imaginary threat. Vulnerable people were typically blamed at random for things they didn’t do, then tortured until they agreed to impossible stories. Then they were burned at the stake for saying things they were forced to say. This nightmare went on for three centuries.

Superstition was obviously a big part of the problem. Strangely, a primitive new spirit of science contributed as well. Indeed, the man most responsible for America’s Salem witch trials also wrote America’s first popular science book.

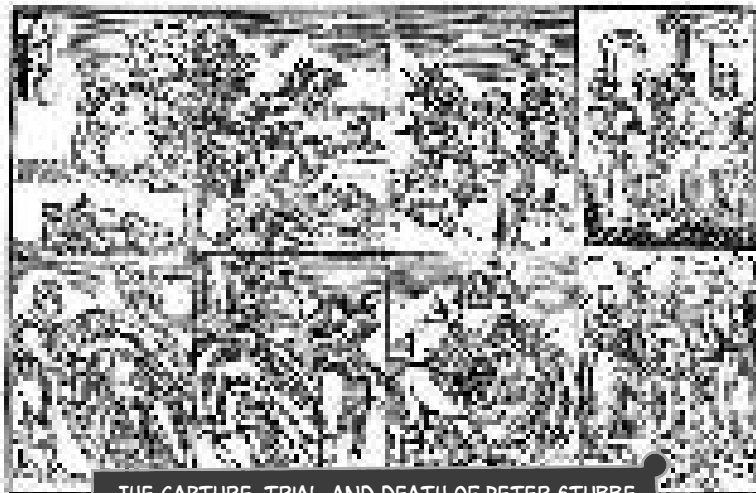
In those days, almost everyone in Europe and America agreed that God created the universe and the rules of right and wrong. Everyone also agreed that the Devil was real. Common people thought demons and witches could do anything using magic. Educated “demonologists” weren’t so sure about that. They tried to study the problem—to use reason and evidence to discover which claims about witches made

sense and which didn’t. They wrote books and held trials to try to get to the truth. For evidence, they used confessions from witch trials and passages from the Bible. Such unreliable evidence led to unreliable conclusions.

A small number of extreme skeptics did dare to think the truth: supernatural witchcraft simply didn’t exist. One

such skeptic was Reginald Scot.

His 1584 book *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* debunked the harmful nonsense of the witch trials. Scot also argued that it was impossible to transform humans into animals. Instead, some confessed werewolves suffered from a “disease” of the mind. Mental illness deluded these people into false beliefs that they were “wolves, or such ravening beasts.”



THE CAPTURE, TRIAL, AND DEATH OF PETER STUBBE

IN THE MOUTH OF MADNESS



Reginald Scot was correct. Madness certainly did play a role in some werewolf cases. Over time, judges began to understand that this was something they should consider.

Scot based his opinion on cases known to doctors. Medicine was very primitive in those days, but it was starting to become more scientific. Doctors began to realize that there were illnesses that could not be explained using non-scientific ancient theories about disease. This had two opposite effects. If doctors couldn't explain a disease, witch hunters supposed that must be evidence that the sickness was caused by witchcraft. However, doctors also pointed out cases where mentally ill patients believed they transformed into beasts when they very plainly didn't. In fact, medical cases of this delusional kind of "lycanthropy" had been known for many centuries before the first werewolf trial.

In one werewolf court case, an accused father and son were "all scratched" from going about on all fours in prison. The judge observed that one was "so much disfigured... that he bore hardly any resemblance to a man, and struck with horror those who looked at him." These supposed werewolves behaved like animals, but they did not physically transform. It's likely they were severely mentally ill. They were executed anyway.

However, some courts were more merciful toward other

delusional "werewolves." In one such case, some men in France came across two wolves devouring the body of young man. They chased the two wolves, and found a filthy beggar named Jacques Roulet cowering in some bushes. The beggar was arrested and tried as a werewolf in 1598. His confessions made very little sense. Some of his confused claims were also proven untrue. Roulet said that the two wolves were really his brother and cousin. However, his brother and cousin were in a far away region at the time of the wolf attack. It seemed clear that Roulet wasn't in his right mind. He was found guilty, but he wasn't executed. He was sent to an insane asylum for two years instead.

Teen Wolf on Trial

In another famous trial in France, a 13-year old boy named Jean Grenier confessed to committing a series of wolf attacks. He claimed that a devilish figure gave him a magical wolfskin that turned him into a wolf. Grenier said that he ate dogs and attacked several children while in this animal form. It seems that no one tortured Grenier to make him say these things. Does that mean his claims were true?

The story began when some older teenaged girls were out herding cows. They were discussing a series of wolf attacks in their area. This was a scary topic. One of the girls had recently escaped from a wolf herself. That's when they came across Grenier resting in the field. The redheaded boy was a beggar. He was dirty, homeless, and small for his age. Nevertheless, he joined the conversation and tried to impress the older girls. He made boasts and told frightening fibs, eventually claiming that he was a ferocious werewolf. This boasting turned out to be a bad idea. The girls later told the authorities what he had said. Grenier was arrested and put on trial.

In court, the boy agreed with everything he was accused of. He also added outrageous new claims. He said his father was also a werewolf.

Grenier was found guilty at first, but the regional government decided to take a second look at the case. They asked doctors to examine the boy. The doctors found that Grenier was mentally unwell. He wasn't a monster; he was an abused and abandoned runaway whose body and mind were stunted by lack of food. It was only fair to take into account the "young age and imbecility of this boy, who is so stupid and idiotic that children of seven and eight years old normally show more intelligence," the court decided in 1603.

The poor boy was spared death or prison. Instead, he was sent to live in a monastery. The monks cared for Grenier as best they could, but his sad life never became happier. A judge later visited the boy at the monastery. He described Grenier as a shy, dirty, half wild creature who had trouble understanding simple things. Grenier remained delusional; he still claimed that he had once been a werewolf. He died soon afterward, at the young age of 20.

THE BEAST OF GÉVAUDAN

It's a tragedy of history that hundreds of innocent vulnerable people were blamed for wolf attacks. It was also a tragedy when people were attacked by wolves in the first place.

The most deadly wolf monster case of all time began in the remote and wild Gévaudan region of France in 1764. Villagers there began to fall prey to some sort of savage animal. At first the attacks were few, but they just kept coming. Over a three year period, more than 100 people were killed. Dozens more were attacked. Newspapers carried sensational stories about "The Beast" across the nation and around the world. Villagers lived in terror. The king sent soldiers to stop the monster. The soldiers laid traps, and organized thousands of citizen hunters. All of these efforts failed.

Witnesses reported something like a wolf, but it did not always sound like a normal animal. Some said the creature's eyes glowed red, or that it walked on its hind legs, or that bullets couldn't stop it. It could apparently leap huge distances. Many witnesses said it was just too big and too deadly to be a normal wolf. Was it a werewolf? A monstrous hybrid with an exotic lion? Or perhaps a hyena released into the French countryside?



Professional expert wolf hunters were set on the case. Many wolves were killed. One especially large wolf was celebrated as the Beast itself, dead at last! The hunters became famous heroes. But the danger wasn't over. Over the next several months, ongoing attacks on shepherds and villagers claimed even more lives.

Finally, a local hunter named Jean Chastel shot another large wolf that was once again thought to be the Beast. At long last, the killings did come to an end.

In some ways, the Beast of Gévaudan remains an unsolved mystery today. Modern writers continue to speculate that the "monster" could have been an out of place exotic animal such as a lion escaped from some French nobleman's private zoo. However, there is no real evidence to suggest anything of the sort. In fact, there's no reason to think there ever was just one "Beast."

The most realistic explanation is that the region just had some tragically bad years for wolf attacks. It's likely that hunger drove a number of wolves to hunt numerous humans for food. Eventually, so many wolves were killed during the hunt for the dreaded Beast that the remaining wolves could find enough natural prey to survive.

Legends within Legends

The Beast of Gévaudan saga is often claimed as the origin for a key element of modern werewolf stories. According to some authors, Jean Chastel brought down the Beast using homemade silver bullets. However, this claim simply isn't true. The silver bullet detail was added to the Gévaudan legend later, *after* modern novels and films made this a standard part of werewolf lore.

When we look over the many varied werewolf stories told throughout history, we can find a few tales that hint at modern sounding details. For example, one ancient Roman story mentioned a werewolf transforming in moonlight. Another Medieval story claimed that werewolves transform during certain phases of the Moon. However, these were not standard parts of werewolf belief. In the stories of past centuries, werewolves most often either transformed at will using magical belts or lotions, or they were cursed to remain in wolf form for years at a time. The idea that werewolves transform only during the full Moon was invented for Hollywood horror movies.

Monster researcher Blake Smith has shown that the silver bullet idea is equally modern. However, this idea does have roots in older folklore about witches. In a few stories, witches in the form of hares could be injured by a silver button or forced to reveal their true form. This usually wasn't the case for werewolves. In most old stories, werewolves could be injured by ordinary weapons such as arrows, axes, or swords. In fact, injuries from normal weapons were often an important part of werewolf stories. These injuries revealed human characters who were secretly werewolves.

EXPLAINING WEREWOLVES

While most people today think of werewolves as completely fictitious creatures like Frankenstein's monster or Jabba the Hutt, in past centuries it was commonly believed that werewolves were a genuine and deadly threat. Some people were thought to be victims of werewolf attacks. Others reported werewolf sightings. Still others were burned at the stake for the supposed crime of turning into wolves.

How can this history of "real" werewolves be explained? Let's look at some of the many "explanations" that have been suggested over the centuries.

1) **"Some people truly do turn into wolves."** This was a popular magical belief in the centuries before science. Needless to say, there is no evidence that this can happen. It would take a supernatural miracle to turn a human into a different species of animal. Miracles are not a scientific concept. There is nothing in science to suggest that miracles are possible.

2) **"Demons create the illusion of animal transformation."** Even witch hunters doubted that people can ever literally turn into wolves. Most demonologists shared the religious beliefs that human souls could not exist in animal bodies, and that God alone had the power to accomplish miracles. They argued that animal transformations must instead be "glamors," or illusions created by demons. This was not a scientific idea either. There is no science-based reason to think that demons exist or that they could somehow magically disguise people as hares, cats, or wolves.

3) **"Werewolves were mentally ill."** It's a medical fact that a few rare patients suffer from psychological delusions that they are animals or that their bodies transform in impossible ways. However, "clinical lycanthropy" cases are much more rare than historical werewolf cases, and the symptoms are not usually a good match for werewolf claims. Nevertheless, it's almost certain that various other types of mental illness contributed to *some* werewolf cases.

4) **"The Beast of Gévaudan, the Werewolf of Bedburg, and other werewolves were really human serial killers."** Thank goodness, serial killers are also very rare. Also, this suggestion does not match the evidence in most werewolf cases. Most victims were clearly attacked by animals. In many cases witnesses actually saw the animals responsible.

5) **"Werewolves were hallucinations caused by ergot poisoning or other drugs."** This is a popular but speculative "rational explanation" for historic werewolf sightings. Ergot is a fungus that sometimes grows on rye grain. It did sometimes did get into bread and cause sickness, including hallucinations. It's entirely possible that *some* strange claims such as werewolf sightings were caused by ergot, various other drugs, unusual dream states, or fevers caused by illness. But hallucinations can take any old form—witches, dragons, birds, colors, shapes, you name it. It's not at all common for anyone to hallucinate wolfmen in particular.

6) **"Werewolves suffered from a disease called porphyria."** This rare genetic disease can make patients' skin very sensitive to light. It can also make people appear deformed. Porphyria sufferers may slightly resemble vampires, but not werewolves. In any event, the disease is far too rare to explain either monster legend.

7) **"Werewolves had a condition called hypertrichosis."** A rare genetic condition nicknamed "werewolf syndrome" can cause thick hair to grow all over a person's face and body. People with this condition do look a lot like the modern idea of werewolves. However, this condition is very rare indeed. Also, there were no werewolf trials where anyone was suspected because they resembled hairy wolfmen.

8) **"Perhaps werewolves were infected with rabies."** Some wolf attacks are caused by rabies, but there are no known cases of a person transmitting rabies to another person by biting. Also, there are vanishingly few old werewolf tales in which someone becomes a werewolf because they were bitten by another werewolf. The idea that the werewolf curse is contagious was invented by modern fiction writers.

So What Is the Truth about Werewolves?

The modern werewolf legend grew from many centuries of storytelling and folklore. At its root are two simple truths: cultures all over the world have imagined what it might feel like to turn into an animal; and, in some places, people have had to worry that they might be eaten by wolves.

Ancient and Medieval werewolf stories varied a lot. Werewolves could be good or bad. Then the werewolf idea was combined with fears about witches. Werewolves became evil bloodthirsty monsters. Centuries later, fiction writers adapted these folklore monsters for modern movie audiences, adding silver bullets and other new details.



RARE GENETIC CONDITION
NICKNAMED "WEREWOLF
SYNDROME"

AMERICAN WOLFMEN

Case closed? Not quite. There remains one puzzling part of the werewolf mystery left to examine. It turns out that modern Americans still report quite a few werewolf sightings in the United States!

In 1987, a Michigan radio disc jockey named Steve Cook released a spooky new song about “dogmen” that walk on their hind legs. The song claimed there was an old legend that these sinister creatures appear every 10 years. New appearances were due that very year; the song warned listeners not to go out at night.

Cook later revealed that he “made it up completely from my own imagination as an April Fool’s prank for the radio”—but it was a more successful prank than he ever imagined. Soon, radio listeners were phoning in to report their own hair-raising encounters with the Michigan Dogman. The legend has been growing ever since.

Tracking the Dogmen

Monster author Linda Godfrey has researched American dogmen or werewolf sightings since 1991, writing several books on the topic. She became involved after a series of sightings near Elkhorn, Wisconsin. She interviewed the people who claimed the first sightings of this so-called “Beast of Bray Road.” Godfrey claims there have now been “over one hundred reports nationwide” from seemingly sincere eyewitnesses.

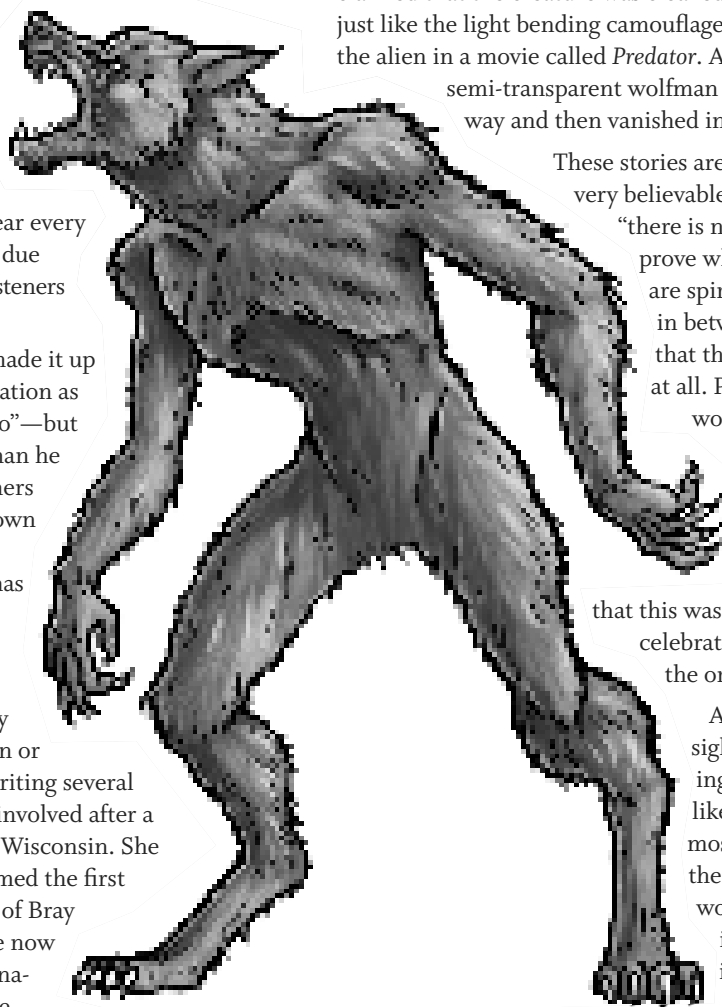
According to these reports, dogmen look just like the werewolves featured in recent horror movies. They’re large and frightening, standing six or seven feet tall with muscular arms and chest. They’re covered in shaggy hair. They have the pointy ears and long snout of a wolf. As one witness put it, the creature was clearly a “werewolf. I’d swear on a stack of Bibles that’s what it was.”

Strangely, these creatures don’t act much like savage movie werewolves. They often appear aggressive, though. Many witnesses say the creatures chased them. However, almost none claim that they were injured or physically attacked. Instead, the mystery beasts usually seem to turn around and run away. (This makes quite a bit of sense for some key sightings...that took place on Halloween night!)

The story gets a lot stranger from there. Many eyewitness claims include bizarre supernatural details. Some said the creatures’ eyes glowed red. Some claimed that the creatures spoke to them using telepathy. Dogmen are sometimes reported with mysterious lights, ghosts, or ominous hooded figures. Bullets apparently have no effect. One man even claimed that the creature was cloaked into near-invisibility just like the light bending camouflage technology used by the alien in a movie called *Predator*. Another man said a semi-transparent wolfman appeared in his hallway and then vanished into thin air.

These stories are all very eerie, but not very believable. Godfrey admits that “there is no hard evidence to prove whether upright canines are spirit, flesh, or something in between,” but the truth is that there’s no solid evidence at all. Photos of supposed wolfmen are typically useless blobs or obvious fakes. There is one very impressive dogman film, but the filmmaker revealed that this was a hoax intended to celebrate the anniversary of the original prank song.

American dogmen sightings may be an ongoing mystery, but the most likely solution is also the most obvious: after all these centuries, werewolves still prowl today in the realm of the imagination.



FURTHER READING

THE CLASSIC BOOK ON THE TOPIC IS *THE WEREWOLF IN LORE AND LEGEND*, BY MONTAGUE SUMMERS (1933). IT’S AS DENSE AS IT IS ODD. SUMMERS INCLUDED HUGE SECTIONS IN OTHER LANGUAGES WITHOUT TRANSLATION. HE ALSO CLAIMED TO BELIEVE THAT WEREWOLVES ARE A “VERY REAL AND VERY TERRIBLE THING.” *THE WEREWOLF BOOK*, BY BRAD STEIGER (1999) IS A USEFUL ENCYCLOPEDIA-STYLE VOLUME.

FOR MORE ABOUT THE DOGMAN MYSTERY, LINDA GODFREY’S *REAL WOLFMEN: TRUE ENCOUNTERS IN MODERN AMERICA* (2012) MAKES AN EASY TO READ INTRODUCTION, BUT SHOULD BE TAKEN WITH A GRAIN OF SALT.